LIFE AS JOURNEY: THE TOURIST ROUTE, THE EXTENDED SELF, AND THE EXTERNAL MEMORY

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INTRODUCTION

If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbour, tho' he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, attributed, 19th century (Partington, 1997: 137)

These words represent, one could say, the spirit of modernity of the nineteenth century: a world in which progress is in the vanguard, innovation resides at the heart of commercial life, and inaccessibility is a problem to be overcome through effort. This aphorism is often cited as emphasising the spirit of enterprise of that era. To all appearances, this is the case. However, it is possible to see two spirits at the centre: certainly, innovation; but beyond that, a spirit of exploration. It is about a society in which effort and the quest to explore, without being certain of the destination, are integrated at its heart: a society that delivers a certain frisson.

This chapter seeks to address life as a metaphorical journey. It concerns itself with the construction of an 'extended self' during an era in which tourism is increasingly identified with exploration, and with a renewed Romanticism. Attention will be paid to tourist events that are incidental and unexpected, and their salience in the construction of a 'personal narrative'. Moreover, recent socio-technological developments will be examined, in terms of their influence on the tourist experience. Reference will be made to a 'culture of the continuous present' and the development of what will be termed an 'external memory'.

LIFE AS JOURNEY

'HOMO NARRANS'

The propensity to view life as a story, by means of a 'narrative paradigm', is, one could say, a fundamental of the human condition. Events and encounters during the course of a life are understood and rationalised in accordance with a need for coherence. The important factor is that the sense of coherence emanates from the experiences and beliefs of the individual (Fisher, 1985). It follows that the narrative paradigm is a construction that is rooted in the theoretical concept known as post-structuralism (Shankar *et al*, 2001: 436). That is to say, meaning exists solely in the mind, and not in some outside 'other': *'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte'*

(Derrida, 1998: 158). Consequently, life is a kind of voyage: a narrative characterised by a beginning, a trajectory, and an ending.

A question presents itself: who is the author? *My Way*, a song by Paul Anka, made famous by its rendition by Frank Sinatra, and sung to a melody of French origin, has become a ballad of choice for funerals in a secular age (Queenan, 2007). Underpinned by the refrain, *I did it my way*, the claim is that

I've lived a life that's full, I travelled each and every highway

and

I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway

These claims, naturally, ring hollow. The reality is that the journey of life is full of experiences that are unexpected; some fortunate, some serendipitous, some unfortunate (Shankar *et al*, 2001: 431; Escalas, 2004: 168). One thinks of Shakespeare's *'…slings and arrows of outrageous fortune…'* (*Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 1). Nevertheless, the individual has the capacity to impose, on their life-as-journey, events of their choice: in the field of material consumption, but in particular, in terms of tourist experiences.

LIFE AS JOURNEY

It is therefore possible to speak of a 'personal narrative', constructed in part of events upon which the individual has had little influence, and in part of other experiences which have been chosen and selected. An individual, when asked about the course of their life during the preceding year, will respond by recounting landmark experiences rather than litanies of ordinary occurrences (Shankar *et al*, 2001: 445). Such landmark experiences would include rite-of-passage events, personal commemorations, and tourist trips (Gibson *et al*, 2012). Psychological studies suggest that holiday experiences play a particular role in the construction of long-term memory (Larsen, 2007). The individual makes efforts to capture these memories by transferring them to the realm of material culture: photography, souvenirs and mementos represent an attempt to secure the experiences within the episodic memory (Urry, 2007: 266-7).

It is perhaps useful to make a comparison between the personal narrative and the functioning of the news media. A paradox resides at the heart of 'the news'. If one asks an editor to explain the purpose of his newspaper, he will respond by saying that it offers reports on what is happening in its locality. But in fact, day after day, there are many ordinary events that merit no mention at all in the news. For example, a university seminar, a regular event that takes place every week, has no chance at all of appearing in the news. Something else is needed to make it qualify as 'news'. For example, if the lecturer were to touch a badly-earthed piece of electrical equipment, with attendant consequences, the event has crossed the threshold between the ordinary and the extraordinary. In this sense, the news, in common with the personal narrative, is an edited version of life.

THE 'NEW ROMANTICS'

'New Romantics' is an expression applied to followers of a style of music, fashion and clothing from the 1980s. Here, however, an attempt will be made to show that in Western advanced society, since the 1980s, we have all become, to a certain extent, new Romantics. In

essence, it is about a transition from an old tourism, which was identifiable by defined resorts, mass movement and communal pleasure, to a new tourism, identifiable by the search for the authentic, movement in small numbers, and individualist pleasure (Voase, 2002: 2-3). Admittedly this proposition is simplistic, because mass tourism has itself expanded very considerably. Nevertheless, a notable growth in what one might call 'exploratory tourism' has been seen. One could say that this evolution is a consequence of a cultural transition, termed 'post-modern', and a desire to recover a lost time; or perhaps, to recover a time that never actually existed (Voase, 2002: 12-15).

One can interpret exploratory tourism as a renaissance of the Romanticism of the nineteenth century. Urry speaks of a 'Romantic tourist gaze', associated with solitude, intimacy and a quasi-transcendental connection with the object of the gaze (1990: 45-6). In common with the emotional aesthetic expression of that same century – one thinks of visual art, music, and poetry – tourists of the age wanted to visit isolated natural environments which were not suited to tourist visitation. In England, when the entrepreneur Thomas Cook made use of the new railway network to deliver groups of tourists to rural Scotland, he encountered resistance (Withey, 1997: 144-7). One hundred and fifty years later, independent tourists in the north of Norway expressed a preference for an experience of the natural world 'without the presence of other tourists' (Jacobsen, 2004: 14). Also, the practice known as 'slow tourism', with origins in the 'slow food' movement of the 1980s with the object of celebrating tourist practices that emphasised absence of haste, is equally evidence of a renewed Romanticism (Fullagar *et al* 2012, Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

THE EXTENDED SELF

COLLECTING, AND COLLECTING ONESELF

We have attempted to establish that the individual constructs a 'life' by means of a personal narrative, which is conceived, and is to be understood, by means of the theoretical concept known as post-structuralism; that the narrative is constructed in terms of a sequence of landmark events; and that, in the context of a 'new tourism', whose appearance can be dated since the 1980s, a renewed Romanticism, which underlines the importance of the individual, the emotional, and the solitary, has become important. It is therefore now appropriate to examine the question of how the individual constructs the connection between their life experiences, from which a selection needs to be chosen for the narrative. It is a question of collecting experiences, in order to 'collect' oneself – to gather oneself together – as a coherent individual. A useful concept is that of the 'extended self' proposed by Belk (1988).

The body of work of Belk is itself extended and extensive, up to the present, but the exposition in a 1988 article offers a summary of his intended agenda. At the beginning, the behaviour of the 'consumer', rather than the 'buyer', is emphasised. The argument is that possessions become part of the self: we are what we possess. The importance of possessions develops in incremental fashion from infancy, to youth, to adult maturity and thence to advanced age. From one age to the next, there are special categories of objects that are incorporated into the self. Belk acknowledges a considerable indebtedness to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, in which the philosopher analyses the connection between the possessor and the possessed by means of control, creation, and knowing (Belk, 1988: 145-6, 150).

One asks how the 'extended self', of which the exposition above is but a light summary, can assist in understanding the role of tourist experiences in the construction of the sense of self. The preoccupation of Belk is in the field of material culture; but he emphasises that

> Of the additional extended self categories considered, places and experiences tend to be seen as most clearly a part of the extended self…those persons, places, and things to which one feels attached (Belk, 1988: 141)

Places, despite being represented through photographs, souvenirs and mementos, are not things that one can collect together and keep at home; it is the same with experiences, which are also immaterial. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the mechanisms of the consumption of the intangible, in order to understand how that works. One needs to study the functions and connections between anticipation, experience, and memory.

ANTICIPATION, EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY

It has already been mentioned that exploratory tourism represents a renewal of the Romantic spirit, with origins in the nineteenth century. In fact, the thesis of Campbell is that present-day consumer culture is representative of a blending of the Romantic ideal, and the Puritan spirit of northern Europe. That sounds strange, because at the heart of the Puritan spirit is the need to work before allowing oneself repose, and the need to control the emotions. But, according to Campbell, these two traditions have something in common: the need for delay. Therefore, contemporary consumer culture requires consumers to work, in order to earn an entitlement to be at their leisure, and pursue their activities of choice as they please (Campbell, 1987). Elsewhere, Campbell suggests that tourism, which demands of the consumer a long period of anticipation prior to the actual experience, is an effective example of 'consumerism' (1995: 118).

It follows that the act of consumption begins, not with the experience, but when anticipation first begins. One can extend the argument: it has already been established that the tourist experience is a constituent part of the personal narrative; that would suggest that the memory of the experience needs to be conserved. Therefore, through photography, souvenirs and mementos, the tourist makes efforts to safeguard the memory. But if anticipation is a constituent part of, one could say, the extended experience, it follows that the memory comprises, also, the anticipation. There are studies that support this argument: anticipation before consumption has an influence on the sense of satisfaction after the event (Mattila & Wirts, 2000: 559; Philips & Baumgartner, 2002: 251). One study, of the thoughts of family doctors on the value of holidays, suggested that anticipation, moreso than the actual experience, had the greater value (Voysey, 2000); evidence from tourists themselves supports this (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2002).

An example that well illustrates this effect subsists in a poem by William Wordsworth, one of the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century. The first and final verses of his three-verse poem, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,* are presented below.

I wandered lonely as a Cloud
That floats on high o'er Vales and Hills
When all at once I saw a crowd
A host of dancing Daffodils;
Along the Lake, beneath the trees,
Ten thousand dancing in the breeze.

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils

(Wordsworth, 1969: 552)

Here is a tourist experience, consigned to memory through the art of the poet. It is useful to analyse this event. One notices, first of all, that this is an episode without particular direction: Wordsworth is a *flâneur.* Second, he is alone: a precondition for an experience of Romantic sensibility. It would not have been the same, had he been accompanied by a large group. Third, he is in the habit of reliving the experience many times, when he has the opportunity to submit to reverie; and to assist his memory, he has consecrated the experience by placing it into a repository, that is to say, into his body of poetry. The aim is to facilitate the recovery of the experience and repeat the sense of joy; and the fact that we are reading his lines in this very instant, two centuries later, bears testimony to his success.

However, in one important sense, Wordsworth and his daffodils are not an exact example of anticipation, experience and memory. In the second verse, not cited above, the poet says that he had not realised how the encounter with the flowers would take up residence in his episodic memory. Moreover, the encounter was not anticipated: he came across the daffodils unexpectedly, 'all at once'. This is evidence of a truth about exploratory tourism which is, one may dare to say, perhaps not well understood: the importance of the unexpected. In this sense, Wordsworth and his daffodils are an example *par excellence.* This requires further examination.

SERENTIPITY: THE SALIENCE OF THE UNEXPECTED

The exploratory tourist is full of anticipation: he waits, with pleasure, for his holiday. Certainly, if he visits Paris, he wants to see the Eiffel Tower. Certainly, he will take a photograph of the Eiffel Tower. No doubt, he will be photographed, by his companions or by another tourist, with the Eiffel Tower. We have all done the same. Will the Eiffel Tower take a place in his memory and, perhaps, in his personal narrative? Perhaps. But to have viewed the Eiffel Tower is not, with all due respect to the Eiffel Tower, a novelty. It has already been established that we have all done the same. Of greater interest are those unexpected encounters that have not been foreseen. The grand sites of tourism constitute a general narrative; but the purpose, and the need, of the tourist, is to construct a *personal* narrative.

Evidence for this is apparent in the novel, *Memoirs of a Tourist*, by Stendhal (1962, orig. 1838). That which the 'tourist' finds interesting is not the great monuments of France, but small serendipitous encounters. For example, on one occasion, the 'tourist' is strolling in the small town of Beaucaire and, attracted by a profound odour, sets out to investigate. He discovers a street full of walls of onions and garlic. He confides in us that he fled (Stendhal, 1962: 184-5). MacCannell, in his commentary on this novel, concludes that the need of the tourist is to have something new to say (2001: 32-3). The pleasures of the serendipitous were also underlined in a study of independent travel: the three features were an evolving itinerary, the willingness to take risks, and 'a desire to experience the unexpected' (Hyde & Lawson, 2003: 13). A similar study (Huxley, 2004) revealed interest in small encounters that became

important because they constituted a contrast with the everyday. One subject spoke of having viewed the 'must sees' such as the Eiffel Tower and the Taj Mahal, but placed greater value on having encountered

> '…tiny vignettes of relatively mundane life that end up being really fascinating because it's so normal for whatever part of the world, but so different from my daily existence'. (Huxley, 2004: 39).

THE 'CULTURE OF THE CONTINUOUS PRESENT'

Up to the present, we have determined that exploratory tourism, which is evidence, one can say, of a renewed Romanticism, constitutes the spirit of a growing part of contemporary tourism; and that this tourism is characterised by anticipation, encounters with the unexpected, and the need to have stories to tell. The result is that tourism is an important component in the construction of what has been termed a personal narrative. In this final part of the chapter, we will examine some current socio-technological developments that could have an important influence on the experience. The term 'culture of the continuous present' is proposed as a means of describing the consequences.

In the English language, there are two forms of the present tense: the simple present, and the continuous present. The simple present takes the form of, for example, 'On Mondays at 1100, *I give* a lecture'. But if, during the lecture, a colleague enters the lecture hall and asks me to help him change a wheel on his car, I would reply, 'Not at present, *I am giving* a lecture'. The continuous present – *am giving* – is represented in the French language by the use of the words 'en train de'. The continuous present is used when action is inhibited by engagement, and the person is not free for other actions. This includes thinking. For example, in a crisis, when many people may be offering advice, it is not unknown to hear someone say, 'Please stop talking, I am thinking'.

'HYPERCONNECTIVITY'

The recent proliferation of smartphones, concurrent with the arrival of Web 2.0 and social media, has created, one could say, a cybernetic human. The facility to be part of a network, and moreover, to be an active participant in the network, transforms reflective time into engaged time. In the United Kingdom, more than 70% of the population possess smartphones (Deloitte, 2013). Facebook, doyen of social media sites, has more than a billion active members (Facebook, 2013). Twitter, a microblogging site, claims more than 500 million participants.

On asks oneself what the consequences will be, culturally and socially, of hyperconnectivity; and in particular the consequences for tourist experience. Neurophysiological studies have shown that when the human subject is engaged in reverie, particular parts of the brain become active (Vincent *et al*, 2006: 3528; Bloom, 2011: 197-8). Studies also indicate that what one may term 'default time' is devoted to making sense of, and giving coherence to, experiences in life (Mason *et al*, 2007: 395). The consequences of a lack of default time are at present unknown. The question is whether a lack of default time will be comparable with a lack of sleep.

A report of the United Kingdom Office of Communications concluded, in 2010, that adult Britons spent half of their waking hours engaged with electronic informational equipment, whether television, the internet, or mobile telephones (Ofcom, 2010). A study of British

university students revealed that a student, on average, spent almost thirty hours per week at the computer: 8 hours studying, 10 hours engaged in leisure pursuits such as games, and 12 hours engaged by social media (Grove, 2012). A report of the UK Government's Office of Science found that almost half of adults aged between 16 and 24 years felt 'at their happiest' when engaged with the virtual world (Foresight, 2013: 22-4).

THE EXTERNAL MEMORY

A computer has the capacity to be connected to an 'external memory', when there is too much information to store within the machine itself. It is the same with human beings. Photography is the means for accumulating memories on holiday, and when a celebration demands that the event be revisited on many occasions. This author has acted as Best Man at three weddings: and he attempted to prevent the guests from expending effort on taking their own photographs, and in so doing, damaging their experience of the actual event and the memory of it. One thinks of Wordsworth, and his encounter with the daffodils: would the experience have been the same, had he had a camera with him? What are the consequences of being engaged in the continuous present, and dependent upon an external memory?

A recent study by Henkel offers a response. Using a simple and elegant methodology, human subjects were invited to look at objects in a decorative arts museum. They were invited, sometimes to look, to look and photograph, and to photograph in detail, that is to say, use a zoom lens. It transpires that to photograph an object was to acquire a memory of it that was inferior that obtained if one simply looked at it. The Best Man had a point: to be engaged in the continuous present is to damage the pleasure of the simple present. Engagement harms the joy of being. However, the research of Henkel also demonstrated that to photograph in detail is to acquire a memory of similar quality to that obtained by simply viewing (Henkel, 2014).

The reality is that smartphones do not solely offer a connection with the internet, and with other cybernetic humans. They also offer the capacity to undertake digital photography: one more way of engaging the individual. The author, some three years ago, was witness to an incident during a concert by a popular musical ensemble known as the *Scissor Sisters.* Seated on the balcony of a concert hall, he watched many young people standing in the well of the hall: all, repeatedly, taking photographs with their telephones. Eventually the lead singer of the group, Ana Matronic, addressed the crowd: 'You are putting so much effort into getting your pictures. Why not enjoy the moment?'

ENRICHED EXPERIENCE?

On the other hand, it is possible to put forward the argument that mobile communications technology offers the capacity to facilitate the augmentation of the tourist experience. Applications for smartphones - 'apps' – have been developed to support the tourist before, and during, the experience. Research conducted by Wang *et al* has suggested that the experience of travel has been 'enriched' by the facility to consult maps, plans and timetables in advance and see recommendations for visiting, walking around and eating. The benefits were a reduction of risk and, even, the introduction of the unexpected (2012: 379). The research subjects were users of apps, and therefore, one can conclude, convinced *aficionados*.

Certainly, to find oneself furnished with a repository of accessible information in an instant, seems to be something to be welcomed. However, if one returns to the quotation from Emerson at the beginning of this chapter, one comes to ask oneself if, before the excursion into the woods, the experience would have been the same if the mousetrap had been examined in advance; the path had been disclosed via satellite navigation; and the quality of the welcome at the house in the woods had been reviewed many times on *TripAdvisor*. The culture of the continuous present demands a revision of the concepts of the 'ordinary' and the 'extraordinary'. The opportunity to escape from the familiar diminishes, at the same time as the technology provides the opportunity, and the obligation, to stay in contact. Liminality, associated with tourist experience, has been compromised (White & White, 2007).

CONCLUSION

In effect, the purpose of this chapter has been to call into question, and to discuss, certain preconceptions. It has been suggested that the pleasure of tourism is not the experience itself, but the anticipation, experience and memory combined. This argument has been supported by reference to ancient poetry, and recent research. It has been suggested that the important features of the tourist trip are not the must-see monuments of the brochures and guides, but trivial incidents and unexpected encounters, sometimes impressive, sometimes ordinary. It has been suggested that a so-called 'exploratory tourism' is rooted in the Romantic spirit of the nineteenth century, characterised by individualism and a facility to express the emotions.

The paradox is that tourism, engendered by the affluent Western world, is growing significantly. This author has suggested, elsewhere, that buyers of branded clothes seek individuality, but are in fact individuals in search of a crowd to join (Voase, 2007: 546). By contrast, contemporary tourists are captives of a crowd, who through a recovered sense of Romanticism, attempt to escape and manifest their individuality my means of constructing a narrative which is, above all, personal. This was true for Stendhal's 'tourist' in 1838, and it is true in the contemporary world, where tourism, in a world of global production, still offers the possibility to construct an individual 'extended self'.

Finally, we have speculated on the consequences of recent socio-technological developments: a 'culture of the continuous present'. The implications of cyberneticism and social media are considerable. Formerly, exploratory tourism had been characterised by uncertainty, the journey into the unknown, and the joy of encountering the unexpected. Above all, there was a gulf between 'away' and 'at home'. Technology has turned these principles upside down. Emptied of its liminal qualities, and with the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary eroded, tourism risks failing to deliver the frisson. Perhaps the secret of human life, in a cybernetic era, is to equip oneself with a certain resistance to its allures.

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